

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGRE-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07
INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
AID-05 PC-01 /074 W
-----066442 151151Z /13

R 151025Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4447

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ABIDJAN 7037

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAGR
SUBJECT: TROUBLE FERKE-CRACKS IN THE SUGAR
COATING?

1. SUMMARY. ON MAY 25, WORKERS RIOTED AT THE FERKE I SUGAR COMPLEX IN NORTHERN IVORY COAST. FERKE MANAGEMENT AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES WERE ABLE TO STEM THE VIOLENCE, BUT THE SITUATION HAS REMAINED TENSE. THE EMBASSY HAS TRIED TO ASCERTAIN THE CAUSES OF THE TROUBLE BUT REPORTS HAVE BEEN SKETCHY AND CONTRADICTORY. (THERE HAS BEEN NO COVERAGE IN THE MEDIA WHICH IS GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED.) ON A RECENT UP-COUNTRY TRIP, THE EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER VISITED FERKE AND DISCUSSED THE SITUATION WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE COMPLEX AND SEVERAL LOCAL OFFICIALS. FOLLOWING IS A CONSOLIDATION OF THOSE AND ALL OTHER ACCOUNTS THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED. END SUMMARY.

2. ROTS BROKE OUT AT THE FERKE I SUGAR COMPLEX ON MAY 25. WORKERS WENT ON A RAMPAGE AND BEGAN SMASHING VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT. CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE WAS SUSTAINED AND SEVERAL VEHICLES WERE
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DESTROYED (REPORTS VARY BETWEEN EIGHT, NINE, AND MANY MORE). THE WORKERS THREATENED TO CUT OFF WATER AND POWER TO THE LIVING QUARTERS OF MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS. THE FACTORY MANAGER AND A CHEMICAL ENGINEER WERE STONED BUT NOT SERIOUSLY INJURED. WHEN THEY TRIED TO STOP THE RIOTERS. AFTER SOME DIFFICULTY,

THE LOCAL POLICE

WERE CONTACTED AND THEY ARRIVED SOON AFTER AND
GOT THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. THE STRIKERS DID
NOT ENTER THE FACTORY AND NO DAMAGE WAS DONE THERE.

3. THERE HAS BEEN NO VIOLENCE SINCE MAY 25, BUT THE
SITUATION HAS REMAINED TENSE. THERE HAVE BEEN
SEVERAL THREATS AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE MANAGEMENT
AND PROFESSIONAL STAFFS, NONE OF WHICH HAVE BEEN
CARRIED OUT. SINCE THE DAY OF VIOLENCE, WORK HAS
RESUMED BUT SINCE THE SEASON IS OVER, THERE
ISN'T MUCH ACTIVITY.

4. THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF THE RIOT IS UNCLEAR,
BUT THE "TRIGGER" WAS APPARENTLY A PERSONNEL
STUDY COMMISSIONED BY SODESUCRE ON CLASSIFICATION
O JOBS AND THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED FOR EACH AS
WELL AS THE SALARY TO BE PAID FOR EACH. SUCH A
NATIONALIZATION WAS LONG OVERDUE FOR TWO REASONS:
(1) SOME PEOPLE WERE OVERQUALIFIED FOR THEIR
JOBS AND DESERVED PROMOTION, AND (2) NEARLY 1000
MORE PERSONS WERE EMPLOYED IN THE COMPLEX THAN
WERE ACTUALLY NEEDED. THE STUDY WAS COMPLETED.
SODESUCRE HAD DECIDED TO GRADUALLY UPGRADE ITS
OVERQUALIFIED EMPLOYEES, BEGINNING AT THE WORKER
LEVEL FIRST. PROMOTED EMPLOYEES WOULD RECEIVE
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A SALARY INCREASE, OTHER WOULD NOT, BUT NO ONE
WOULD BE DOWNGRADED OR FIRED. WITH RESPECT TO THE
1000 SUPERFLUOUS PERSONNEL, IT WAS DECIDED THAT
THEY WOULD BE TRANSFERRED TO FERKE II FOR CONTINUED
EMPLOYMENT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ABIDJAN 7037

5. THE TROUBLE BEGAN WHEN THE WORKERS GOT WIND OF THE STUDY (AT THE TIME OF THE RIOTS, THE DOCUMENT WAS STILL AN IN-HOUSE STUDY). DURING MID-MAY, SOME WORKERS DEMANDED THE IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY'S RECOMMENDATIONS. IN ADDITION, OTHERS (PRESUMABLY THOSE WHO WOULD NOT HAVE RECEIVED RAISES) DEMANDED A SALARY INCREASE FOR ALL EMPLOYEES. NEGOTIATIONS WERE BEGUN. SODESUCRE CLAIMED SALARIES WERE ALREADY 28 PERCENT ABOVE THE THE LEGAL MINIMUM AND THAT THEY COULD NOT AFFORD ACROSS THE BOARD INCREASES AT THAT TIME.THEY DID AGREE TO ACCELERATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS AND TO BEGIN WITH THE LOWEST PAID WORKERS IMMEDIATELY. SODESUCRE THOUGHT NEGOTIATIONS WERE GOING WELL AND THAT A BASIC AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED WHEN RIOTING BROKE OUT ON MAY 25.

6. SPECULATION AS TO THE FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE OF THE OUTBREAK IS RIFE--BUT MOST OF THE LOGICAL CATALYSTS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN RULED OUT. TO CATALOGUE THE APPARENT POSSIBILITIES:

A. LABOR UNION INSPIRATION: UGTCI OFFICIALS, BOTH IN FERKENSSÉDOUGOU AND ABIDJAN DENY KNOWING ANYTHING
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ABOUT THE CAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE.

B. TRIBAL ANIMOSITIES: APART FROM THE PROFESSIONALS ("CADRE") WHO ARE A MIXTURE OF FRENCH AND OTHER EUROPEANS PLUS MAURITAINS AND A FEW IVORIANS, THE WORK FORCE ARE MOSTLY SENOUFU--AND EVEN ALLOWING FOR DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF THE SENOUFU, THERE WAS NO HINT OF TRIBAL ANIMOSITY.

C. THE PAY: AS ALREADY MENTIONED, FERKE WAGES ARE HIGHER THAN REQUIRE BY LAW, AND PRESUMABLY AS GOOD IF NOT BETTER THAN THOSE PAID BY OTHER EMPLOYERS IN THE AREA.

D. MANAGEMENT/WORKER DIFFERENCES: ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO PROOF, THIS SEEMS TO BE AT LEAST AN ELEMENT

OF THE PROBLEM. ATTACKS AND SUBSEQUENT THREATS WERE ALL AGAINST PROPERTY AND MEMBERS OF THE CADRE (BOTH AFRICAN AND NON-AFRICAN), AND THERE IS AN UNDERCURRENT OF STRESS WHEN OFFICIALS TALK ABOUT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PROFESSIONAL AND LABOR ELEMENTS AT FERKE. WHILE SUCH AN OCCURRENCE WOULD BE UNUSUAL FOR IVORY COAST WHERE ENORMOUS PAY AND LIFE-STYLE DIFFERENTIALS BETWEEN PROFESSIONALS AND LABORERS ARE GENERALLY ACCEPTED, IT MAY AUGUR THE WAY OF THE FUTURE.

E. GENERAL CLIMATE: THIS CATCHALL HAS BEEN INVOKED BY NEARLY ALL SOURCES AS AN ELEMENT OF THE PROBLEM. WITH TALK OF SWEEPING CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT, WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION, DOUBLE DIGIT INFLATION AND A SHORTAGE OF RICE AND WATER IN MANY AREAS OF THE COUNTRY, EVERYONE IS A BIT EDGY.
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7. WHATEVER THE CAUSE, THE SITUATION HAS NOT YET BEEN RESOLVED. THE MANAGEMENT STUDY HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED AND TALKS ABOUT SALARY INCREASES ARE CONTINUING. SOME SOURCES BELIEVE THAT THE DISPUTE WILL HAVE TO BE WORKED OUT AT HIGHER GOVERNMENT LEVELS IN ABIDJAN,BUT ADD THAT ANY ACTION IS UNLIKELY BEFORE THE ANTICIPATED MINISTERIAL SHAKE-UP.

8. MEANWHILE, THE LOCAL SITUATION REMAINS SOMEWHAT TENSE AND TROUBLE COULD BREAK OUT AGAIN IN SEPTEMBER OR THEREAFTER WHEN THE NEW SEASON BEGINS. WITH DISGRUNTLED WORKERS, EDGY MANAGEMENT,AND GENDARMERIE ON ALERT, THE ATMOSPHERE AT FERKE IS ANYTHING BUT SWEET AT THE PRESENT TIME. STEARNS

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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